



50 Years of HOSPITALITY

The Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa and the island of Aruba mark a tourism milestone

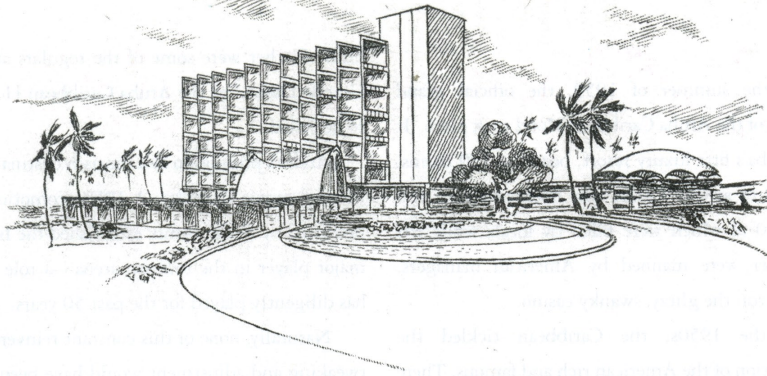
Text by Rona Coster
Photography by Steve Keith

The Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa is celebrating its 50th anniversary this summer. The Island officially recognizes the opening of this resort, originally known as the Aruba Caribbean Hotel, as the start of the tourism economy here.

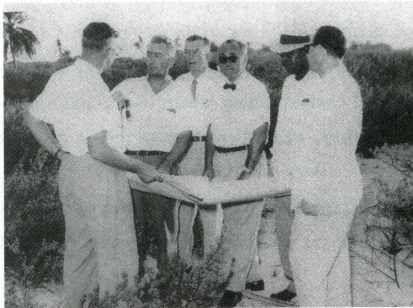
Aruba's first tourist hotel was the Coral Strand, located on the outskirts of Oranjestad, on the road to the airport. It opened in December 1943 and still operates today as the quaint and friendly Talk of the Town Hotel. The second hotel for tourism was Hotel Scala, which opened in downtown Oranjestad in March 1949. As a result of these initial efforts to promote the Island as a vacation destination, Aruba registered 980 visitors in 1950.

In 1953, the Aruba Tourism Bureau became a government agency and embarked on its lifelong mission to create demand for the Island. Aruba counted 100 hotel beds—42 at the Coral Strand, 22 at Scala, and 36 in the next hotel to open, Hotel Marchena.

Inspired by the success of Miami Beach, Aruba recognized the importance of the development of beachfront resorts. That same year, an official contest was held for the best design of a tourist hotel on pristine, magnificent Palm Beach here on Aruba. The winning plan, the "Basiroeti," was to be financed by the government, yet it encountered many hurdles and took until December 1954 to actually get off the ground. (The Basi Ruti Hotel was finally finished in February 1957 as a low-rise cluster of bungalows sprawled over the sugary sand of virgin Palm Beach, where the Playa



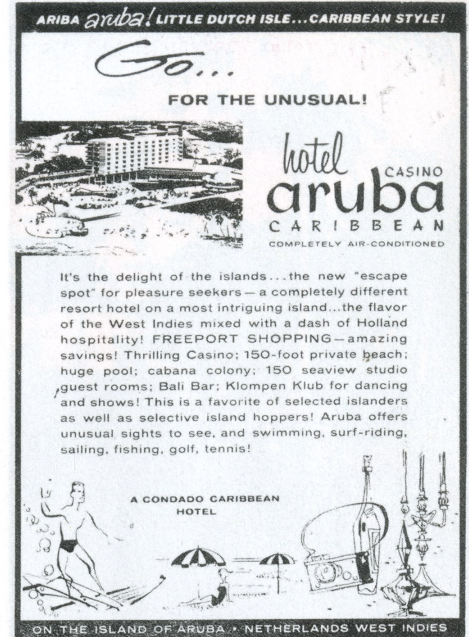
Sketch of the "Aruba Caribbean Hotel" as per architect Morris Lapidus.



Above Left: Architect Lapidus plans out the location of the Carib on Palm Beach.



Above Right: The official ribbon-cutting ceremony.



Linda Beach Resort stands today.)

In 1956, the motivated island government approved plans for the building of a luxury tourist hotel—which would be called the Aruba Caribbean Hotel—on Palm Beach. Two local visionaries—Juan Enrique Irasquin, the man who inspired the naming of Aruba's hotel boulevard, and Oscar Henriquez, who is still enjoying frequent travel and his flower garden—wrote a lengthy report filled with recommendations regarding the construction of this hotel. To help them decide on an appropriate model for Aruba's budding tourism trade, they gathered information and inspiration as they traveled to Miami and Puerto Rico, two leading vacation destinations at the time. Irasquin and Henriquez felt that Miami and Puerto Rico's beaches paled in comparison to Aruba's, concluding that Aruba's beaches are its biggest selling point. They additionally concluded that in order to compete with such well-established tourism destinations, Aruba would have to attract clients seeking luxury, not economy.

In their great wisdom, Irasquin and Henriquez insisted on a celebrity architect to design their new dream resort. The building designs by award-winning, iconic American architect Morris Lapidus were approved. Lapidus was the creator of curvy, flamboyant Neo-Baroque hotels; he was the genius who built the Fontainebleau Hotel and famed Eden Rock on Miami Beach. Legends have him scouring Palm Beach and studying the direction of the wind until he was satisfied that he had found just the perfect spot. He personally surveyed the grounds and initiated the clearing of what is today the Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino &

